



Australian Bureau of Statistics

1301.0 - Year Book Australia, 1997

ARCHIVED ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 11/03/1997

VOLUNTARY WORK

Community support is not undertaken only through government programs. A significant contribution is made by volunteers within the community. Volunteers undertake a wide range of activities and make a significant contribution to the work of a variety of organisations and groups. Voluntary work not only meets needs within the community, but can also provide the volunteers themselves with benefits.

A national survey of Voluntary Work, conducted in June 1995, has provided a picture of the characteristics and motivations of volunteers, the areas in which they are involved and the activities they perform. For the survey a volunteer is defined as someone who willingly gives unpaid help in the form of time, service or skills through an organisation or group. It does not include people who volunteer 'informally'.

WHO ARE THE VOLUNTEERS?

In Australia, 2,639,500 people aged 15 years and over provided some form of voluntary work through an organisation or group in the 12 months ended June 1995 (table 7.15). These volunteers represented nearly one-fifth (19%) of the population. Women were more likely to be volunteers than men, with 21% of women and 17% of men undertaking some voluntary work.

People living in State capital cities were less likely to be involved in volunteer work than those people living in the other parts of the State. One-sixth (16%) of people in the capital cities were volunteers compared with nearly one-quarter (24%) of people in other parts of the State.

Age and life-cycle stage also had an impact on the pattern of volunteer involvement. People aged 35-44 years had the highest volunteer rate, with 27% of people in this age group reporting some involvement. For volunteers in this age group, just over 80% worked for groups or organisations associated with education, training and youth development, and those supporting sport, recreation and hobbies.

The people in this age group are also likely to be married with children, and their higher than average involvement in volunteering reflects family commitments. This is further highlighted by the finding that women with dependent children had a volunteer rate of 30% compared with 19% for those without dependent children.

Employed people were more likely to be volunteers than people who were unemployed or those who were not in the labour force. People working part-time and those looking for part-time work had high rates of involvement, the highest rate being 30% for women employed part-time.

7.15 VOLUNTEERS, Age by Sex

Age	Males		Females		Persons	
	Volunteer rate(a)		Volunteer rate(a)		Volunteer rate(a)	
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
15-24	127.8	9.4	171.1	13.0	298.9	11.2
25-34	188.7	13.6	267.8	19.0	456.5	15.3
35-44	320.9	23.8	423.2	30.9	744.0	27.4
45-54	236.6	21.0	261.9	24.0	498.6	22.5
55-64	129.0	17.1	164.2	22.1	293.2	19.6
65 and over	140.0	15.7	208.4	18.9	348.3	17.4
Total	1,142.9	16.7	1,496.6	21.3	2,639.5	19.0

(a) The volunteer rate is the number of volunteers expressed as a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over in the same group.

Source: Survey of Voluntary Work 1995.

FIELDS OF VOLUNTARY WORK

Volunteers give their time to organisations and groups involved in a diverse range of activities. Sport, recreation and hobby organisations, and welfare and community organisations attracted the highest levels of volunteering. As table 7.16 shows, the volunteer rate was also high for education, training and youth development groups (25%) and religious groups (18%). The rate of involvement was much lower for all other types of organisations.

Men were most likely to be involved in the fields of sport, recreation and hobbies, with 42% of volunteers assisting these organisations. Welfare and community groups and education/training and youth development organisations attracted the most women, with 32% of volunteers giving time to each of these organisational groups.

7.16 VOLUNTEERS, Field of Voluntary Work

Field of voluntary work(a)	Males		Females		Persons	
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
Sport/recreation/hobby	475.6	41.7	351.7	23.5	828.2	31.4
Welfare/community	308.4	27.0	476.2	31.8	784.7	29.7
Health	49.9	4.4	131.9	8.8	181.7	6.9
Emergency services	96.7	8.5	31.9	2.1	128.6	4.9
Education/training/youth development	191.3	16.7	476.6	31.8	668.0	25.3
Religious	184.8	16.2	281.3	18.8	466.1	17.7
Environmental/animal/welfare	50.2	4.4	48.0	3.2	98.2	3.7
Business/professional/union	56.2	4.9	30.0	2.0	86.2	3.3
Law/justice/political	24.6	2.2	19.3	1.3	43.9	1.7
Arts/culture	41.1	3.6	66.9	4.5	108.0	4.1
Foreign/international	6.7	0.6	13.3	0.9	19.9	0.8
Total	1,142.9	100.0	1,496.6	100.0	2,639.5	100.0

(a) As a volunteer can work in more than one field of voluntary work, the figures for individual fields of voluntary work will not add to the total.

HOW MUCH TIME?

Volunteers worked an estimated 433.9 million hours in the 12 months to June 1995. People's time commitment to volunteering over the 12 month period varied from less than 20 hours to more than 300 hours. As table 7.17 shows, just over 18% of volunteers gave less than 20 hours and another 18% gave between 40 and 79 hours. About 14% gave more than 300 hours.

7.17 VOLUNTEERS, Hours Volunteered			
Hours(a)	Males %	Females %	Persons %
Less than 20	19.8	17.4	18.5
20-39	14.7	14.4	14.6
40-79	17.1	19.4	18.4
80-139	16.0	16.8	16.5
140-299	17.6	17.8	17.8
300 or more	14.7	14.1	14.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.2

Source: Survey of Voluntary Work 1995.

ACTIVITIES PERFORMED

The types of activities that volunteers undertake are many and varied. Fundraising (47% of all volunteers) and management and committee work (41%) were the main activities. Nearly half the female volunteers spent time in fundraising and 40% were involved in preparing and serving food. Men were more likely to be involved in management and committee work (46%) and fundraising (42%).

HOW AND WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME INVOLVED IN VOLUNTEERING?

Volunteering brings benefits to volunteers as well as to the organisations they volunteer for. While the reasons people initially become volunteers are diverse, 42% said that they had wanted to help others and the community. One-third of volunteers attributed their reasons to personal or family involvement and just over one-quarter cited personal satisfaction.

The major personal benefits that people gained through volunteering were personal satisfaction for 59% of volunteers and social contact for 38%.

People who were part of a family were slightly more likely to attribute their initial involvement to the fact that they were asked by someone (31%), than that they or their family were involved with the organisation (30%). However, people who were not part of a family were most likely to have been initially involved because they knew someone else who was involved.

Source: Year Book Australia 1997

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